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After the Summit: Investing in Nuclear Materials Security

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Last week, the second Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) in Seoul focused global attention on reducing the threat of nuclear terrorism and, more generally, on enhancing the security of nuclear materials. South Korea successfully hosted a meeting that brought together 53 heads of state and 5 leaders of international organizations in a rare concentration of global leadership. The NSS gathers into a single headline-grabbing summit a basket of different technical agreements addressing removal of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium, physical security of nuclear materials, nuclear forensics, reduction of civilian nuclear uses of HEU fuel, regulatory structures, and export controls. With the exception of Iran, North Korea, and Uzbekistan, all countries with significant stockpiles of weapons-grade radioactive material were present.

Several concrete goals were achieved at the summit. More importantly, the momentum of the *process* of increasing security for nuclear materials was maintained. By emphasizing that nuclear materials security is a global public good, the NSS process gives states—including potential rivals—an opportunity to work together, thereby helping shape security identities. The United States should remain an active leader in institutionalizing this process through both diplomatic engagement and the commitment of financial resources.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

By commanding the attention of top national leaders, summits motivate national security bureaucracies to address important issues. This year's summit provided a target date for achieving commitments made in the 2010 Washington NSS: according to one thorough NGO study, 80% of those commitments were met.

One of the most straightforward goals of the 2010 summit was to rid numerous states of all HEU and plutonium. Eight states have now done so: Chile, Libya, Mexico, Romania, Serbia, Taiwan, Turkey, and Ukraine. In addition, the diplomacy leading up to the Seoul NSS consolidated international consensus to minimize civilian use of HEU. This was manifest in declaratory statements and the Seoul Communiqué, shifting of research reactors away from HEU, and plans to reduce use of HEU in scientific and medical pursuits. There were also modest increases in the number of states committed to abide by international conventions to protect radioactive material and prevent nuclear terrorism. Finally, the participants agreed to reconvene in 2014, a notable achievement for a summit that could easily have sputtered out after its inaugural 2010 meeting.

Although the 2012 NSS achieved several tangible goals, it could have gone further. The language used in the joint communiqué is among the weaker available in diplomatic parlance: signatories are "encouraged" 28 times but never "required" to undertake anything. Moreover, the basket of initiatives under the NSS's purview was not consolidated, and numerous different standards for safeguarding nuclear materials were not unified. While the IAEA's standard (INFCIRC/225/Rev.5) was mentioned in the joint statement, only a handful of countries made new commitments to adopt it. Likewise, only nineteen states were willing to support the similarly concrete National Legislation Implementation Kit on Nuclear Security.

By design, the summit excludes North Korea's weapons program and China's expansion of its nuclear arsenal. Another important issue—the security of Pakistan's materials—was only marginally addressed. In part, these limitations are related: Beijing's deepening cooperation with Pakistan's dangerous

nuclear program and reluctance to strongly confront North Korea increase the insecurity of some nuclear materials. More broadly, these policies—and Beijing's own opaque modernization—limit China's ability to act as a global leader on nuclear security.

CONSTRUCTING INSTITUTIONS, IDENTITIES, AND SECURITY

Even given these shortcomings, the NSS has a positive impact by bringing most of the key Asian players together to focus on communal threats and interests. Of course, that is no substitute for diplomatic efforts to constrain North Korean nuclear developments, engage China over its growing arsenal, or secure Pakistan's nuclear materials. Nevertheless, by emphasizing that securing nuclear materials is a "public good," the NSS encourages cooperation among major powers (and potential competitors), including among officials who manage the most sensitive parts of states' national defense bureaucracies.

The NSS also helps develop new forums for collaboration on nuclear issues that are not limited by their origins in the Cold War proliferation regime. The framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, for example, keeps Pakistan and India out of many important discussions. That is at odds with contemporary reality, and the development of alternative regimes will facilitate the evolution of the nonproliferation regime. It is no surprise that both India and Pakistan pushed at the NSS to be included in the various WMD export-control groups outside the IAEA, such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Similarly, Taiwan's limited international space does not prevent it from participating in some NSS-related initiatives.

This proliferation of nonproliferation-related processes certainly has costs. The lack of common baselines makes it difficult to measure progress because states can choose agreements selectively. But in the context of a general diffusion of power from states to societal and commercial actors, it is becoming harder for "governments" to lead. Overlapping "minilateral" agreements that sit at the nexus of commercial and security interests will thus take on an increasingly important role in nonproliferation initiatives.

Looking toward the 2014 summit, states should focus their attention on several goals:

- They should accept a diversity of institutions but emphasize a single standard for securing materials through the IAEA, the organization with the widest reach. The United States should prioritize this issue in its diplomatic engagement with countries that possess HEU and plutonium stockpiles.
- States should continue to move toward the goal set out in 2010 of securing all vulnerable nuclear materials. Again, the United States should use all the tools of statecraft (both carrots of aid and sticks of exclusion from cooperative ventures) to encourage countries to move in this direction.
- China should provide constructive, active leadership; without this, the most potent dangers will worsen. Changing its position on North Korea's and Pakistan's nuclear programs will be necessary for Beijing to assume this role.
- The United States needs to fully fund its own nuclear security initiatives, such as the Second Line of Defense Program and the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, even in times of budgetary scarcity. ◈

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